

CF - your papers?
see 'X' on p. 2,

ECL



FILE

10 DOWNING STREET

cc: FCO
ODA

THE PRIME MINISTER

27 November 1984

My dear Nicholas,

Thank you so much for your letter of 23 November with your reflections on the unhappy stay of Igor Rykov and Oleg Khlan. It was kind of you to speak so generously of the help which you and they received from officials. We are all very grateful for the generous and honourable role which you played. Like you I have grave fears for the fate of the two young men. But I believe that we all did our best for them.

Yours

Margaret

The Lord Bethell

Ly



FROM

NICHOLAS
BETHELL

TELEPHONE
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LONDON W2 2SS

The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP
10 Downing Street
London
SW1

23rd November 1984

Dear Margaret,

R24

IGOR RYKOV AND OLEG KHLAN

The dust seems to have settled a bit after Igor Rykov³ and Oleg Khlans return to the Soviet Union. I therefore thought that I would drop you a line with a few reflections on this rather sad episode. I am not looking for any substantial reply, only to share a few thoughts with you and with others who were involved in bringing the two boys to this country. I have sent copies of this letter to Geoffrey Howe and Leon Brittan.

I very much regret the trouble and inconvenience that arose from their presence in the United Kingdom. Senior administrators spent a lot of time on the case and I am sorry that their efforts may appear to have been wasted.

I am also sorry about all the inconvenience that was caused on November 11th, when the two boys actually flew back to the Soviet Union. It was Remembrance Sunday and a substantial team of senior officials - including Derek Thomas, Anthony Rawthorne (acting Head of Immigration at the Home Office) and Nigel Bloomfield (Head of FCO Soviet Department) - had to be assembled at very short notice so as to make sure that the two boys were travelling home of their own freewill. They did their job excellently and I am only sorry that their Sunday was spoiled.

The boys may now be put on show before the cameras in Moscow to make anti-Western propaganda, but I think it more likely that they will simply disappear. They deserted their units and they described the horrors of Soviet Afghanistan, including in one Radio Liberty interview even before I met them. The Soviet Authorities will not forgive them this.

The Soviet Union will not gain much in propaganda terms for the return of these two sad and confused young men. Nor will they be able to tell the Soviet Authorities very much. During their five months in Britain they had one short interview with a junior Home Office official here in my home. Otherwise they had no contact with any British officials whatever. They were not "debriefed" and they had no "minder" from the security service.



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-2-

X

The decision to keep them away from British officials was obviously the right one. They were not defectors. They did not choose to come to the United Kingdom. They were being kept in a hole in the ground for nearly a year near the Afghan border, for some of the time in chains. They begged me to help them and their captors were anxious to get rid of them, so anxious that I concluded that they would probably be "got rid of" physically if something were not done. Igor Rykov wrote you a long and moving letter as a result of which you decided to help them for humanitarian reasons. I do not think any of us have anything to be ashamed of in this.

They were looked after entirely privately, by the European Liaison Group and other East European émigrés. In July-August, without my knowledge, they drew a total of £204 in social security benefit. This money has been repayed and as far as I know they received nothing out of public funds. Their travel here and their accommodation, maintenance, clothing and pocket money have all been paid for privately.

There is no doubt that the total lack of official backup made it hard to absorb two traumatised young men into British society. I well understood why it was decided to keep clear of them. Still, it is very difficult for people from the Soviet Union to adapt to life in the West and they were rather "thrown in the deep end".

They set their hearts on going on to Canada, where there are large Russian and Ukrainian farm communities. When Canada refused to take them, their hearts sagged even more and I wrote to Leon Brittan on October 4th (enclosed) expressing my anxieties about them. There is evidence to suggest that Soviet officials contacted them in a London restaurant shortly after this refusal. The letter to Igor Rykov from his mother, wife and brother was obviously expedited by the Soviet police and it was the last straw.

They went to the Soviet Embassy the day after the letter arrived, taking nothing with them and telling their hosts that they would merely inquire about their families and seek to clarify their personal positions. Once they were in the embassy, of course, that was it. They never even collected their belongings. They were in the embassy for 48 hours and they left it only to go to the Home Office and on to Heathrow airport.

We did what we could, but it was not enough. Maybe nothing would



-3-

have been enough in these two particular cases. I believe though that the damage caused to this country by their return to the "Motherland" will be minimal and I only hope that this case will not deter you from your policy of reacting sympathetically to requests for asylum from citizens of Soviet-bloc countries.

I would like to thank all those in the Home Office and FCO who worked on this complicated case. Their efforts were worthwhile, I believe, in spite of the story's sad ending.

Yours ever

Winston Churchill

CONQUEROR
LONDON

P.M. saw briefly.



10 DOWNING STREET

11/11

P.M.

Two Russian Soldiers.

- 1) The F.O. are in touch with Russian Embassy.
- 2) The Russians seem to be responding positively to us seeing the two. (probably tomorrow).
- 3) Russians say the two 'want to go back'.
- 4) FO considering whether Lord Bethell can see them.
Duty Clerk.